

**ESCHATOLOGY: MAJOR VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIUM IN REVELATION 20:1-10**

THE PREFIX BEFORE "MILLENNIUM" REFERS TO THE "TIME OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING" AS IT RELATES TO THE MILLENNIUM	<b>PREMILLENNIALISM</b> "SECOND COMING <u>BEFORE</u> THE MILLENNIUM"	<b>POSTMILLENNIALISM</b> "SECOND COMING <u>AFTER</u> THE MILLENNIUM"	<b>AMILLENNIALISM</b> "NO LITERAL MILLENNIUM"
<b>Definition</b>	Christ's second coming will occur <u>before</u> the millennium.	Christ's second coming will occur <u>after</u> the millennium.	There will be <u>no</u> literal historical reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years. His second coming ushers in the eternal state.
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Christ will return at the end of THIS AGE with His saints to the earth to reign for 1000 years as King.</li> <li>2. In the millennium the nation Israel will experience the blessing God promised to Abraham and David pertaining to Israel's Land, Nationality or (seed), and Throne. N.T. believers will likewise share in the covenant blessing having been engrafted into the one people of God (Romans 11).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The church is not the kingdom but it will bring in the kingdom (a utopian, Christianized condition) by the preaching of the gospel.</li> <li>2. Christ will not be on the earth during the kingdom. He will rule in the hearts of His people, but will return after the millennium. (conservative postmill).</li> <li>3. No literal 1000 year millennium. The church not Israel will receive the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David in a spiritual sense.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The kingdom reign of Christ and His saints is in existence for the period of time between Christ's two advents. (The millennium is happening now.)</li> <li>2. The kingdom is either the church on earth (Augustine's view now perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church) and/or the saints in heaven (Warfield's view).</li> <li>3. The promises to Israel about a land, seed and throne are completely fulfilled now in a spiritual sense in the church.</li> </ol>
<b>Advocates</b>	Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Tyndale, some Anabaptists, Moravians, Mennonites, John Wesley, Ryrie, Walvoord, Graham, Criswell, Moore, Grudem, Erickson, Akin, Mohler, Swindoll, and MacArthur.	Daniel Whitby, Johnathan Edwards, Charles Wesley, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, Augustus Strong, B.H. Carroll, G.W. Truett.	Origen, Augustine, Roman Catholic Church, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, B.B. Warfield, L. Berkhof, G. Beale, W. Hendriksen.

## **The Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ**

Revelation 20:1-10

### **Introduction**

In Acts 1, just before He ascended, Jesus was asked by His disciples in v. 6, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom?” The kingdom about which they were asking, the kingdom in which Jesus Christ will be universally acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords, is that kingdom which is discussed in Revelation 20. It is the millennial kingdom, the 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth.

The Tribulation, with its seal, trumpet and bowl judgements, has ended (Rev. 6-18).

Israel has experienced a great end time revival (Rev. 7:1-8; Rom 11:25-26). The nations, the people groups of the world, have come to Christ (Rev. 7:9-17).

Antichrist (the Beast) and the False Prophet have been revealed, defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev.19:19-21). Babylon, that evil, organized religious, political, social and economic world system that stands in opposition to God has been destroyed (Rev. 17-18). Armageddon has taken place (Rev. 14:14-20; 16:16-21; 19:17-21), and Jesus has come again to the earth to rule and reign for 1000 years as its rightful Master, Lord, and King (Rev. 19:11-16).

The doctrine of the millennium, mentioned only here in Revelation 20, has generated significant controversy throughout the history of the Church. Sadly, Christians have

too often divided unnecessarily over the issue. Basically 3 major views have been held by various students of Scripture.

#### A. Premillennialism

The word “millennium” comes from the Latin words *mille* (thousand) and *annus* (year). The word “pre” before the word “millennialism” refers to the time of Christ’s second coming as it relates to the millennium, and thus the term “premillennialism” refers to the millennium (1,000-year period) being preceded by Christ’s return to the earth. Sometimes premillennialists are referred to as chiliasts. The word chiasm comes from the Greek word *chilioi* meaning a thousand.

Premillennialism holds to the following points:

1. Christ will return at the end of this age, at the end of the Great Tribulation, with His saints to the earth to reign for 1,000 years as King.
2. In the millennium Israel will experience the blessings God promised to Abraham and David pertaining to Israel’s (a) land, (b) nationality (seed), and (c) king (throne). New Testament believers will likewise share in these covenant blessings having been engrafted into the one people of God (Rom. 11).

3. The church today is not completely fulfilling these promises made to Israel. Certain aspects of these covenants have been inaugurated, but others await future eschatological fulfillment.
4. The millennial kingdom is the 1,000-year period in which Jesus Christ rules over the earth as the promised Messiah, the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:14 ff.). This kingdom will be inaugurated at His second coming and therefore at the end of the tribulation (Rev. 19:11-21). The millennium is an intermediate kingdom of 1,000 years before the establishment of the eternal state (Rev. 20:1-6; 21-22).

\*Who has held this view?

Premillennialism was the dominant view in the early church held by Papias, Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius; later the Waldenses, Tyndale, some Anabaptists, the Moravians, the Mennonites, Latimer, the Huguenots, John Wesley, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and many nineteenth-and twentieth-century exegetes (Ryrie, Walvoord, Graham, Criswell, MacArthur, Swindoll, Jeremiah, Akin, Mohler, Moore, Grudem, Carson, Osborne, Piper).

B. Amillennialism (sometimes called “realized” millennialism)

The prefix “a” means “no,” and thus amillennialism holds that there will be no literal reign of Christ on earth for 1,000 years.

The basic tenets of amillennialism are these:

1. The millennium or kingdom reign of Christ and His saints is in existence for the period of time between Christ’s 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. We are in the millennium right now.
2. The kingdom is either realized in the church on earth (Augustine’s view now perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church) and/or the saints in heaven (B.B. Warfield’s view). There will be no future reign of Christ on the earth prior to the New Earth and New Heavens, and the word “thousand” is a symbolic number indicating a long period of time.
3. The promises to Israel about a land, seed, and throne are being fulfilled now in a spiritual sense in the church.
4. God’s promises to Israel were conditional and have been transferred to the church because Israel did not meet the condition of obedience.
5. Christ is ruling now in heaven where He is seated on the throne of David, and Satan is presently bound between Christ’s two advents. This binding

relates primarily to Satan's inability to stop the preaching and spread of the gospel to the nations. Text cited to support this view include:

**Matthew 12:29**, "Let me illustrate this. You can't enter a strong man's house and rob him without first tying [binding] him up. Only then can his house be robbed!"

**Luke 10:17-19**, "When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to him, "Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!" "Yes," he told them, "I saw Satan falling from heaven as a flash of lightning! And I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you."

**Colossians 2:15**, "In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ."

\*Who has held this view?

Amillennialism has been held by Origen, Augustine, the Roman Catholic Church, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, John Calvin, Zwingli, and several in the modern era including B.B. Warfield, L. Berkhof, O.T. Allis, Graeme

Goldsworthy, William Hendriksen, Vern Poythress, R.C. Sproul, Greg Beale and my good friends Mark Dever, Ben Merkle and David Platt.

### C. Postmillennialism

The prefix “post” means “after” and thus postmillennialism means that Christ’s second coming will occur after the millennium. The tenets of this view are these:

1. The church is not the kingdom but it will bring in the kingdom (a utopian, Christianized condition) to the earth by preaching the gospel. (Liberals of this position who are antinatural believe the millennium will come through human effort and natural process, i.e., evolutionary progress. They do not expect a literal and historical second coming.)
2. Christ will not be on the earth during the kingdom. He will rule in the hearts of His people, and He will return to the earth after the millennium.
3. The millennium will not last necessarily for a literal 1,000 years. The 1,000 is symbolic of a long period of time. This is similar to amillennialism.
4. The church, not Israel, will receive the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David in a spiritual sense.

\*Who has held this view?

Postmillennialism was first taught by Daniel Whitby (1638-1725), and has been held by Jonathan Edwards, Charles Wesley, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, Augustus H. Strong, James Snowden, Lorraine Boettner, B.H. Carroll, and George Truett. Some would identify Augustine as a postmillennialist. This view is not very popular today, though persons associated with what is called “Theonomy,” “Dominion Theology,” and “Reconstructionism” advocate it. Gary North and Gary DeMars are names associated with these movements.

Now, before I defend my view let me again say I do not think this is a doctrine we should divide over. Discuss it? Yes. Debate it? Yes. Divide over it? No! Good, godly men and women who believe the Bible differ on this issue. Some of my closet friends hold a different view. I greatly love and respect them. I learn from them. Still, having said that, I do think premillennialism is the best position.

So, why am I a premillennialist? Why do I believe that when Jesus comes again to this earth He will establish a worldwide kingdom with Jerusalem as His capital from which He will reign as universal Lord and King for 1000 years?

- 1) It is the view that best honors a normal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic while still recognizing the prophetic and apocalyptic nature of Revelation.

Chapter 20 clearly follows chapter 19. The word “millennium,” meaning 1,000, occurs 6 times in verses 1-7. Never in Scripture when the word “year” is used with a number is its meaning not literal. The two resurrections mentioned in verses 4-7 clearly speak of physical bodily resurrections. All of this supports premillennialism. The normal approach to Scripture means that the promises about Christ returning to establish on earth His millennial reign of 1,000 years are to be taken in the normal sense. His kingdom is in existence now (John 3:3, 5: Acts 28:31) in heaven and in the hearts of men, but it will be present and fully manifested on the earth during the millennium. Thus His kingdom is both “now” and “not yet,” realized and yet future.

2) The promises to Israel have not been transferred to the church. The church has been engrafted into these promises as Romans 11 clearly affirms. The complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New Covenant have not taken place yet. The church and Israel though distinct, are related to each other in God’s plan of redemption personally, nationally, and cosmically. Since the church began on the day of Pentecost, the church is in some sense separate from the nation Israel. Normal grammatical interpretation thus makes a warranted distinction between Israel and the church. However, as Ephesians 1-3 teaches, there is now one people of God which constitutes the church, the eschatological people of God gathered and realized for all eternity.

- 3) Consistency in interpretation. Premillennialism maintains that its interpretation is consistent. Since the prophecies about Christ's first advent were fulfilled literally, the prophecies about His second advent can be expected to be fulfilled in the same way.
- 4) In the Psalms and Prophets, a future, eschatological kingdom patterned after but surpassing the model of the Davidic kingship is predicted. This kingdom is a universal kingdom of peace and prosperity with the Anointed Messiah ruling over the whole earth. (Ps. 2; 21; 45; 72; 96; 98; 110; Amos 9:11-15; Is. 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 24-25; 40:3-11; 43:15; 44:6, 22-23; 65:17 ff.; Micah 4:1-8; 5:1-5; Jer. 23:1-6; 33:14-26; Ez. 34:23-31; 37:24-28; Zech. 9:9-10; 14:9, 16-17; Mal. 1:11, 14; Dan. 2; 7).
- 5) The New Covenant (Is. 59:20-21; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:37-42; Ez. 11:17-21; 16:60-63; 36:24-34; 37:21-28) in particular states that God will cause Israel to repent and be obedient (Is. 59:20; Ez. 36:27, 31; 37:24). God will cleanse and forgive Israel (Ez. 16:63; 36:25, 29; 37:23). The Holy Spirit will permanently indwell all His people (Is. 59:21; Ez. 36:27; 37:14). Israel will be permanently established forever in their land as a nation (Jer. 31:35-37; 32:41-44; Ez. 36:28; 37:25). God will be worshipped by Israel and will place His presence among them forever (Jer. 32:38; Ez. 37:26-28).

6) The words of Jesus support best premillennialism. Note His promise to the 12 apostles in Matthew 19:27-28, “Then Peter said to him, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?” And Jesus replied, “I assure you that when I, the Son of Man, sit upon my glorious throne in the Kingdom, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Note again His words to the apostles in Acts 1:6-7, “When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?” “The Father sets those dates,” he replied, “and they are not for you to know.” It is important to note that He does not deny or correct their hope for a future kingdom.

7) Paul’s teaching concerning future Israel in Romans 11:25-29 fits best within a premillennial framework.

These are powerful arguments for the premillennial understanding of Revelation 20. I find them compelling. Now, let us examine the text and note particular features of Christ’s kingdom on the earth. There is really good news in these verses.

**I. Before the Kingdom Satan is bound      20:1-3**

- Christ has returned and defeated the forces of evil on the earth (19:11-21).

John now sees “an angel coming down from heaven,” coming down to earth.

The phrase “I saw” occurs repeatedly at the end of Revelation (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1). The most natural reading is to see this indicating chronological sequence and progression. These things happen one after the other (Mounce, 361). 2<sup>nd</sup> coming → Millennium → Final Rebellion → Great White Throne → Eternal State. The millennium is the beginning of God’s restorative work “on the way” to the New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem of chapters 21-22.

- The angel from heaven “holds in his hand the key to the bottomless pit” or the abyss. The key indicates authority. The abyss is mentioned seven times in Revelation (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). MacArthur notes that in Revelation, the abyss is always a “reference to the temporary place of incarceration for certain demons. The abyss is not their final place of punishment; the lake of fire is (Matt. 25:41). Nevertheless it is a place of torment to which the demons fear to be sent (Luke 8:31)” [MacArthur, vol. 2, 234]. The angel also has in his hand “a great chain” (v.1). The great chain is for a great prisoner and carries the ideas of binding and confinement.
- This angel now seizes the one who was his former master before he rebelled against God. Four names or titles are given which describe his character and devices (cf. 12:9). He is “the dragon,” mentioned 12 times in Revelation. He is terrifying, powerful, cruel, dangerous and vicious. He is “that ancient

serpent” which recalls Genesis 3 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3) and the Garden of Eden. He is our ancient enemy who deceived Adam and Eve ushering in the Fall. He is “the Devil” (Gr. *diabolos*) meaning the slanderer, the accuser. He is “Satan” (Gr. *Satanas*) meaning the adversary, the enemy, our opponent. This is our archenemy who hates us and lives for our misery, our death, our destruction. Osborne says, “In this context the list of names might almost be official, as if the legal sentence is read to the condemned prisoner as he is being thrown into prison” (700).

- Because this angel has the delegated authority of God, he can take authority over the one the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8, “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Note the 4 steps taken to bind and confine our ancient foe for 1000 years: 1) “he bound him for a thousand years,” 2) he “threw him into the pit” (Gr. *abyss*), 3) “shut it” and 4) “sealed it over him.” Satan’s activity, even his presence on earth, is completely curtailed and brought to a halt for the entire millennium. His deceptive work among the nations is stopped for a thousand years! Only after the millennium is finished is he released, and then for only “a little while” (v.3). This short-lived release from captivity is discussed in verses 7-10. Mounce makes a perceptive and telling observation at this point when he says, “Apparently a thousand years of confinement does not alter Satan’s plans, nor does a thousand years of freedom

from the influence of wickedness change people's basic tendency to rebel against their creator" (363). What an indictment once again on the wicked hearts of evil demons and evil humanity.

## **II. During the Kingdom the saints will reign            20:4-6**

- John provides only a very brief description of activity of the millennial kingdom in these verses. Additional insights, as previously noted, are found in text like Isaiah 11:1-11; 65:17-25; Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15 and Micah 4:1-5. John sees thrones, and "seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed." Matthew 19:28 teaches that the 12 apostles will sit as judges over the 12 tribes of Israel. First Corinthians 6:3 speaks of believers judging angels. Revelation 2:26 says the saints will have authority over the nations. Could this be a reference to glorified saints ruling over natural born persons in the millennium? And Revelation 5:10 teaches that the followers of the Lamb "shall reign on the earth." This is all good news even if the precise details remain a mystery.
- John then sees a second group, martyred saints. These are described as those who 1) "had been beheaded ("executed") for the testimony ("witness") of Jesus and 2) for the word of God." Further, they had not 1) "worshiped the beast or his image and 2) had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." These tribulation saints had remained faithful and true to the Lamb. "They

loved not their lives even unto death” (12:11). These faithful believers were previously seen in chapters 6 and 13. They are now rewarded for their faithfulness as they are gloriously resurrected! They came to life in bodily resurrection and are also granted the privilege to reign with Christ as co-heirs “for a thousand years” (cf. Rom. 8:17). John calls this “the first resurrection.” It is a bodily resurrection in kind and the first resurrection in time. How do we know this? Because “the rest of the dead,” unbelieving humanity, are not resurrected until after the millennium when they will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15). Believers in Jesus enjoy the first resurrection unto glorified eternal life. Unbelievers experience the second death (eternal separation from God) at the final judgment. Interestingly, the term second resurrection never occurs in Scripture.

- Verse six provides a beautiful summary as to the destiny of the followers of the Lamb. They are called both blessed (happy, fortunate) and holy (set apart for God). Why? Because they share, participate in the first resurrection, the glorification of the body unto eternal life. And, it does not end there! Three additional blessings are bestowed on the redeemed: 1) over these “the second death (eternal and spiritual death) has not power,” 2) “they will be priests of God and of Christ” serving their great God during the millennium and for all eternity and 3) “they will reign with him for a thousand years.” John

MacArthur, drawing on various biblical text, provides a wonderful summary of what life will be like in the millennium: “A final blessing for the participants in the first resurrection is that they will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ for a thousand years, along with believers who survived the Tribulation. Politically and socially, the rule of Christ and His saints will be universal (Ps. 2:6-8; Dan. 2:35), absolute (Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4), and righteous (Isa. 11:3-5). Spiritually, their rule will be a time when the believing remnant of Israel is converted (Jer. 30:5-8; Rom. 11:26) and the nation is restored to the land God promised to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18). It will be a time when the Gentile nations also will worship the King (Isa. 11:9; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 14:16). The millennial rule of Christ and the saints will also be marked by the presence of righteousness and peace (Isa. 32:17) and joy (Isa. 12:3-4; 61:3, 7). Physically, it will be a time when the curse is lifted (Isa. 11:7-9; 30:23-24; 35:1-2, 7), when food will be plentiful (Joel 2:21-27), and when there will be physical health and well-being (Isa. 33:24, 35:5-6), leading to long life (Isa. 65:20).” [MacArthur, vol. 2, 239]. The millennium will be a wonderful time under the cosmic and universal reign of King Jesus.

### **III. After the kingdom sinners will be defeated      20:7-10**

- These verses record what can be called “the final battle” between God and Satan, good and evil. Osborne points out, “There are five aspects of this scene:

the release of Satan, his deception and gathering of the nations for the final battle, their surrounding God's people, fire descending from heaven to devour the nations, and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire" (710). Why does our God allow the evil one a final desperate grasp at power? I believe the answer is two-fold. First, to demonstrate the evil intentions of Satan that consume him now and forever. Second, to reveal that even in a near perfect environment with no Satanic temptation man is capable and willing to rebel against his gracious and loving God.

- At the beginning of the millennium two types of persons are on the earth: 1) believers with glorified bodies and 2) believers with non-glorified bodies who survived the Tribulation. Non-glorified believers can and will have children. These persons, like all persons, will have the opportunity to say yes or no to Jesus. Outwardly it appears virtually all will say yes. Inwardly, however, in their heart, many will say no. When the opportunity comes to rebel against the most wonderful leader the world has ever known, they will jump at the chance. Their doom, however, is sealed even before the rebellion begins.
- Satan is released from his prison (v.7). Immediately he goes out with a two-fold agenda: 1) to deceive the nations and 2) gather a great army to war against the Lord (v.8). "Gog and Magog" is a reference to Ezekiel 38-39. Here it stands for the enemies of God among the nations of the world. They march on

“the beloved city” (v.9), the city of Jerusalem, where King Jesus reigns over His worldwide kingdom. Immediately “fire came down and consumed them.” In a flash, in a moment, the final battle is over. An army “like the sand of the sea” is vaporized instantaneously! “Like Armageddon a thousand years earlier (19:11-21), the “battle” will in reality be an execution” (MacArthur, vol.2, 242).

- Our text ends with Satan finally receiving his just reward: he was “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet was.” And this unholy trinity’s eternal destiny? “They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Their just judgment is literal. It is eternal. No reprieve. No relief. No second chance. No end.

### **Conclusion**

There is a lot to take in from Revelation 20, exegetically, theologically and even personally. Grant Osborne provides a helpful overview that addresses all three of these, reminding us that God is holy and sin is serious. He will not tolerate sin and evil forever. Their end is in sight and it is coming. He writes:

“In 20:4-6...the saints sit on thrones and judge the nations for the thousand-year period. In 20:5-6 the contrast between saint and sinner comes to the fore, and this has strong evangelistic potential. Every non-Christian must be aware that only believers will experience the “first resurrection.” For the unbelievers

the only “resurrection” they will experience will be the one that leads to the “second death,” but that will have no “power” over the Christian. The believer will know only “life,” but the unbeliever will have only eternal “death.”

God allows Satan and his followers to have one last gasp, yet the purpose there is to prove beyond any doubt that the hold of depravity over the sinner is total. Though the nations have had a thousand years to experience the [benevolent] authority of Christ, as soon as Satan is released they flock after him. This tells the reader that God’s only response must be eternal punishment. The power of sin is eternal over those who have rejected Christ again and again, as seen in the repeated repudiations of God’s offer of repentance throughout this book (9:20-21; 16:9, 11), culminating in the final refusal after experiencing the reign of Christ for a thousand years. So God can respond to eternal sin only with eternal torment. Thus, as the enemies of God and the saints surround his people, he sends fire from heaven to devour them as a prelude to the eternal fire that will be their destiny.

At that time Satan joins the other two members of the false trinity (19:20) in the lake of fire, where their followers will soon join them. God’s justice demands this response. Those who are offended by such teaching have too low a realization of the terrible nature of sin and the natural response that divine holiness must have toward it. We must remember the many times in this book

that God sought their repentance, and those who did repent (11:13) no longer faced such judgment. But God cannot abide sin, and his reaction must be swift and final.” (717).

Final judgment will be swift. It is truly final. Are you prepared? Are you ready?

Only those who follow Christ will be. I pray that is you.